



# MANAGING GEORGIA'S MANAGED LANES

Okay, managed lanes aren't for everybody.

But they are for anybody. They do work. And you're almost certain to be seeing more of them, throughout Metropolitan Atlanta and likely in every large urban center in America.

The premise is simple; any driver willing to pay a pre-determined fee can access greater mobility in a managed express lane. If you don't want to use the lane, that's fine; it's your decision. Choose to pay a nominal fee and the express lane is available. It's all about giving motorists options and choices.

These managed, or express, lanes almost always will be tolled. That's not the Georgia Department of Transportation's first choice for dealing with Atlanta's growing congestion. But for now, it's the only affordable option.

There are more than 5.5 million of us in Metro Atlanta; our number expected to exceed 8 million by 2040. Traffic is projected to increase by some 30 percent in that time; truck traffic may double. And we already drive more than 132 million miles **each day**.

If Metro's transportation infrastructure is to keep pace, we'll need to spend \$126 billion, more than twice the amount we expect to have available from traditional sources.

Enter public/private partnerships and managed express (toll) lanes -- private sector firms willing to invest their technology and hundreds of millions of their dollars to improve Georgia's transportation system in exchange for a share of toll revenues to be set by the State. The concept has proven successful time and again across the country and most recently right here...

Yes, contrary to breathless blog bleatings and disingenuous news stories, facts show the I-85 express lanes doing exactly what was envisioned when this demonstration project was conceived three years ago. In just its first weeks, usage tripled to more than 11,000 vehicles a day, which for about a dollar a trip, moved through the corridor about 15-mph faster than general purpose (GP) lane traffic, and often 25+ mph faster and saving 25-30 minutes.

*For the record, we'll acknowledge (again) that express lanes – in this or any other corridor envisioned – aren't designed to measurably improve traffic flow within the general purpose lanes. By their very definition, they are alternatives motorists can choose for greater mobility when GP lanes are congested. Express lanes also encourage bus rapid transit usage by giving those vehicles free access.*

Georgia DOT envisions a network of these express lanes connecting just about all of Metro Atlanta's freeway system -- more than 750 lane miles, mostly added capacity from new lanes. It's a daunting, expensive proposition -- \$16 billion+, far more than the Department's shrinking motor fuel tax revenues can provide. It simply can't be done without private sector partners and tolls.

What might be an alternative?

- More GP lanes? Just as expensive to build but no private partners; not sustainable for managing growth; and offer no incentive to use transit.
- Freight corridors bypassing Atlanta? Needed and promising but expensive; subject to political interference; at best, decades in the offing.
- Commuter Rail Transit? Likely more expensive than express lanes; projected inadequate ridership.

This state -- this nation -- needs to give serious consideration to what it wants in a transportation network for the latter half of this century and beyond. But meanwhile, traffic builds; delays lengthen. And as Voltaire wrote, "*The perfect is the enemy of the good.*"

Express lanes forsake no one; rather, they give each motorist -- all motorists -- a good chance and a good choice.

*Vance C. Smith, Jr., is Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation*